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E.O. 12958: DNG: CO 09/22/2019  
 TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [SE](#)  
 SUBJECT: SEYCHELLES: OCEAN LOOK TOPS AGENDA DURING  
 PRESIDENTIAL MEETING

REF: A. A) BLASER-DEPT SEYCHELLES-PIRACY EMAILS MAY 5-6  
 ¶B. B) PORT LOUIS 132  
 ¶C. C) PORT LOUIS 127  
 ¶D. D) PORT LOUIS 381  
 ¶E. E) PORT LOUIS 316

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Virginia Blaser for reasons 1.4 (b)  
 and (d)

¶1. (SBU) This is an action message for Department and Africa  
 Command. Please see paras 3d(i), 3h, and 3j below.

¶2. (S/NOFORN) SUMMARY: On September 18, Charge d'Affaires  
 (CDA) met with President James Michel to deliver ref A points  
 on the issue of piracy and the role of the Ocean Look  
 operation in the Seychelles. Permanent Secretary Jean Paul  
 Adam and POLOFF attended as notetakers. The President cleared  
 on all ref A points, adding that the Government of Seychelles  
 is "committed to work in partnership with the U.S. for peace  
 and security in the region and around the world." The GOS,  
 he said, is prepared to contribute its share to the combating  
 of regional and world security problems, including support to  
 counter-piracy, counter-terrorism, counter-drug, force  
 protection, and humanitarian assistance projects. Should the  
 U.S. have additional requirements, the President would be  
 amenable to providing support to other or expanded missions,  
 requesting only that any such proposals be delivered to him  
 personally before any other USG-GOS approach is made. The  
 Seychellois people support the UAV presence in the country,  
 Adam added, and the President recommend GOS and USG consider  
 jointly whether some kind of appropriate ceremony be  
 considered for the first flights of the UAVs from Mahe. The  
 President also indicated a willingness to review a US draft  
 MOU for piracy transfer and trials. END SUMMARY.

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 OCEAN LOOK OPS  
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¶3. (S/NOFORN entire paragraph 3) On September 18, Charge  
 d'Affaires met with President James Michel to provide ref A  
 briefing points and generally discuss the Ocean Look project.  
 Points provided are repeated below, for the record, including  
 the President's reaction point-by-point:

a) (S) CDA noted that with the UAVs due to arrive on/about 25 September, it was time to have a direct, classified review with the President on the UAV operation and operational plan. While we had discussed in various meeting the generalities of the project, USG wanted to ensure transparency and good dialogue with the President on this important mission. The President agreed, and noted how pleased he was with the mission to date, and that he looked forward to the discussion with CDA. He agreed that the briefing was "Secret" and concurred with the need to maintain discussions in very close-hold circles (full disclosure at present, he said, with just himself and Jean Paul Adam).

b) (S) CDA informed the President that this was the first deployment of these US Navy UAVs; and that the UAV program would include a contingent of personnel for launch and recovery, force protection and maintenance personnel. The total number of USG personnel in Seychelles for this mission would be approximately 77. The President said this was reasonable and understood the need for this size and type of contingent.

c) (S) As authorized by the recent Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), around-the-clock military uniformed and armed security guards will be in place within the designated access controlled airfield hangar/operations facilities. Security is anticipated to consist of 8 man teams armed with M-16 rifles and/or 9 mm pistols. Storage of weapons and small arms ammunition will be within the access controlled hangar/operations facilities and will be continuously guarded. No weapons or ammunition would leave the controlled area. The CDA added that a Force Protection Plan had been provided the previous day to the MFA, and would be provided later on the 18th to the Chief of the Defense Forces. USG requested GOS concurrence of this plan prior to weapons or ammunition arriving in Seychelles. The President thanked CDA, noting that foreign import and use of weapons could be politically sensitive in Seychelles (given its political history), and that he recognized that such usage fell under our SOFA agreement. Nonetheless, he asked CDA to ensure that the plan was approved by Brigadier General Payet, the Chief of the Defense Forces, prior to bringing the weapons and ammunition into the country. Jean Paul Adam noted that the agreement that weapons and ammunition would not leave the secure area was in line with all prior discussions with USG reps on the subject.

d) (S) USG desires to be completely transparent with the President with regard to activities of the UAVs while they are flown from the Seychellois territory. CDA noted that while direct discussion between our governments had included references to a range of activities these UAVs could conduct, the USG wanted to clarify our intent to conduct an array of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance activities with these airframes, and to provide specifics to the GOS regarding such activities. Such activities, would include counter-piracy, counter-terrorism, counter-drug, force protection for African union missions, and humanitarian assistance. More specifically:

i) (S) Counter-terrorism missions will involve intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance flights over the Horn of Africa to support ongoing counter-terrorism efforts. The UAVs originating from Seychelles and flying counter-terrorism mission will not conduct direct attacks. The CDA stressed the sensitive nature of this counter-terrorism mission and that this not be released outside of the highest GOS channels. The President wholeheartedly concurred with that request, noting that such issues could be politically sensitive for him as well. President Michel opined that piracy and terrorism can be similar, and in the case of Somalia, that country could prove as a "nest for terrorism" if the problem isn't attacked head on. The two issues of piracy and terrorism in Somalia, therefore, are linked and very important. He also asked whether, in addition to publicly released "anti-piracy" element of these UAVs, the USG/GOS might be able to mention

publicly that the UAVs could also serve counter-drug goals. He noted that he is working to "clean up" drug problems in the Seychelles, and that making note of this would be very useful in discouraging drug operations around the islands. Action request for addressees: Request permission to allow for counter-drug element to be released officially either by the GOS or the USG.

ii) (S) Although ref A briefing points provided "if asked" comments regarding force protection of African Union missions involving the supply of threat warning to AMISOM commanders, the President did not ask for clarification of the "AU Force Protection" point, so CDA did not/not raise this ref A talking point.

iii) (S) Humanitarian assistance missions would only be conducted following a natural disaster where the impacted nation has requested USG assistance. The President said he had not considered natural disaster assistance element of this UAV asset, and considered it a very good use of the UAV program.

e) (S) Each UAV sortie is able to conduct more than one of these activities (counter-piracy, counter-drug, counter-terrorism) during a single mission. The President said he understood completely and had no concerns about the multi-use element of these UAVs.

f) (S) The first two to three weeks of activities will focus on equipment calibration and ground and flight testing in and around the Seychelles Exclusive Economic Zone. The President said that this "made sense" and wondered whether the USG and GOS could consider an "appropriate outreach" event around the first few take offs of the UAVs. Perhaps an invitation to the press to see a UAV up close, to take photos and/or have some sort of "inauguration flight." He thought this would go over very well locally.

g) (S) These missions will be flown over the Seychelles, the Western Indian Ocean and the Horn of Africa. The president concurred.

h) (S) If a threat is detected by the UAV which may affect the Seychelles, the USG intends to provide the relevant counter-piracy and counter-terrorism information from the UAV to the GOS. The President was pleased that this kind of cooperation would be forthcoming, and presumed that such information would not be usable in a court of law, but rather as a heads up to his own (or coalition partners) to intersect suspicious activity and thus develop their own legal case against criminal activity. Jean Paul Adam commented that we will need to create a mechanism for quick and appropriate passage of information from the UAVs to the GOS. (Action request: Post requests Africa Command provide recommend SOP for passage of such information for Embassy review and discussion.)

i) (S) The apportionment of the UAV sorties toward one activity vice another is unpredictable and will be driven by threats and intelligence collection requirements. The President said he understood and had no concerns on this point.

j) (S) There is no plan, at this time, to arm these UAVs. Should the desire to do so ever arise, the USG would seek discrete, specific discussions with the appropriate GOS officials to gain approval. The President concurred, and asked that such approval be sought by in-person contact directly with the President and not anyone else in the GOS. He would be willing to consider a range of future and expantionary requests, but would need to consider the internal Seychellois political environment and implications at the time any request would be made. CDA added that the GOS should be aware that the UAVs, although unarmed, do have equipment that could appear to the public as being weapons, and asked for the President's opinion regarding the best way to ensure assumptions weren't made by those who see the UAVs taking off from the public airport. The President noted that

his earlier idea of having some kind of press/outreach event, in which this could be explained, would be very helpful. (Action Request: Post requests review of the possibility for such an event, and concurs that it would be positive gesture. If possible, Post would recommend a "UAV air show," allowing reporters to view the UAVs in their non-sensitive configuration (i.e. prior to installing any sensitive gear), if possible)

¶4. (S/NOFORN) At the end of the brief, President Michel told CDA that "everything is clear" and that he looks forward to continued cooperation and development on this program. He understand that in the future, there may be other situations and needs from the USG and that he stands ready to have discussions on such points or requirements. The United States should consider Seychelles a partner for the long term, he noted, and that Seychelles wishes to contribute its fair share to the combat against piracy, terrorism, drugs, and other regional and world security concerns. "We know we are small, but we believe our location can be strategically important" for the United States, said President Michel. He noted that he had "no further questions" and that he is confident everything is moving well and in the right direction. Let's just proceed, he finished.

¶5. (C) According to Jean Paul Adam, the Seychellois people are happy to have the UAVs present in their country. They see it as a serious step in the fight against piracy it and sends a message of deterrence to pirates, terrorists, drug smugglers, and illegal fishing boats in the region. Everyone is taking the presence of the UAVs "the right way" and the GOS wants to be open and transparent with the general public in the non-sensitive areas of the program.

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PIRACY MOU?  
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¶6. (C/NOFORN) CDA raised the topic of piracy trials and asked how negotiations were going with the EU and the UK. "Not always smoothly" Adam said, adding that he had urged his Attorney General to look toward the American model of signing a SOFA first, then moving toward collaborative talks, vice the EU/UK method of putting a set document on piracy trials forward without "the needed infrastructure." The GOS welcomes receipt of a USG MOU for piracy trial and detention, recognizing that the USG is willing to have collaborative discussions and has demonstrated a willingness to make changes to the MOU in the reflection of the Seychelles context. This type of collaborative process goes a long way to renew and strengthen the cooperation between the Seychelles and U.S. governments, he added. (NOTE: Post provided the L forwarded MOU draft to GOS on 22 September, and will continue to follow-up for reactions/comments to forward to appropriate DOS stakeholders. END NOTE.)

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MEDIA REFORM  
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¶7. (C) The President raised some of his recent efforts in improving openness and a democracy in his country. He has used, he said, the economic reforms as a platform for long-needed changes in his country. One reform in particular has to do with the media. The President commissioned a study written by a member of the opposition and one from a former "Reporters Without Borders" officer, to research media in Seychelles and make recommendations on media reform. It is time to open up our media, said the President. This study initially received criticism from the opposition, said Adam, but now that it is finished and posted on our government website, many opposition members see it as a positive move forward.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE FOR WASHINGTON

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18. (S) CDA noted that the President was not going to attend the UNGA, and asked whether he might have a final message for Washington on all the above points. "Yes," he said. "Please tell Washington that the Seychelles is committed to work in partnership with the U.S. for peace and security in the region and in the world."

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COMMENT  
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19. (S/NOFORN) The meeting with the President was very cordial and warm. He provided all the needed concurrence and support to the Ocean Look operation. The discussions solidified his personal desire for the Seychelles to be a partner in the program and he is fully committed to working with us on the way ahead. USG should be cognizant, however, that President Michel faces some internal controversy; not on Ocean Look per se, but politically even within his own party. According to a variety of discussions between CDA and other COMs, the President's initiative to minimize corruption -- particularly counter-drug efforts -- is not well received by those in power who benefit from such illegal activities. Ocean Look provides the President with some public credibility as a president who can deliver for the protection of his people and the general economy. His decision not to attend UNGA and the lunch with President Obama comes from his desire to instead to spend the time "in the constituencies conducting grass-roots outreach directly to the Seychellois people" (quote from Jean Paul Adam). It could be seen that this outreach is an effort to shore up popular support.

BLASER